

Subject: Lethal Disease Found in Ticks on Reptiles in Florida**Date:** Tue, 4 Jan 2000 08:52:16 -1000**From:** Fred Kraus <fkraus@hawaii.edu>**To:** biisc-l@hawaii.edu

ISC folks,

For your information a more detailed follow-up of a news item I passed around earlier.

Fred Kraus

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>Lethal Disease Found in Ticks on Reptiles in Florida

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>1) Summary/Introduction

>2) Text of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Emergency Prohibition

>Against Importation of Certain African Tortoises

>3) Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: Division of Animal

>Industry --Heartwater Disease --Specific Reasons for Finding an Immediate

>Danger to the Public Health, Safety and Welfare

>4) Text of Memo To: Reptile Dealers, Importers, Pet Shops, and Interested

>Persons

>>From the Division of Law Enforcement on the Prohibition on Importation of

>Certain African Tortoises

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>1) Injurious Wildlife and State Import Ban in Florida

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>As of 12/21/99 there is an emergency State rulemaking banning the importation

>into the State of Florida of any African spurred tortoises (*Geochelone*>*sulcata*) or leopard tortoises (*Geochelone pardalis*). The emergency ban is

>due to the recent

>finding that some of these reptiles are infected with "tropical bont ticks"

>carrying the rickettsial bacterium (*Cowdria ruminantium*) and may transmit

>the Heartwater Disease. Heartwater is an acute tick-borne disease of

>domestic and wild ruminants, including cattle, sheep, goats, deer and

>antelope. Florida estimates that should this disease enter the U.S.,

>mortality rates in susceptible species could be expected to range from 40

>to 100%.

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>On November 29, 1999, ticks collected from imported tortoises in a

>Hillsborough County, Florida reptile facility tested positive for the

>disease. The facility is under quarantine, eradication procedures are under

>way and it is hoped that no wildlife or domestic animals have been infected.

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>Effective December 17, 1999, Florida passed an emergency rule prohibiting

>the importation or transportation into the State of any African spurred

>tortoise or leopard tortoise. On December 9, 1999, the Florida Department

>of Agriculture and Consumer Services also passed an emergency rule

>targeting Heartwater Disease transmission by restricting the importation

>into the State of all wildlife without an Official Certificate of

>Veterinary Inspection showing the animals to be free of disease and vectors

>of infectious disease.

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>Anyone with questions or seeking documentation about the tortoise prohibition

>by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation commission may call

>(850)488-6253 and questions about the need for Veterinary Certificates may

>be directed to the Division of Animal Industry, Bureau of Disease Control

>at (850)488-7182.

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>2) FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION
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>RULE TITLE: RULE NUMBER:
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>Emergency Prohibition Against
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>Importation of Certain African Tortoises 68A-ER-99-01
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>SPECIFIC REASONS FOR FINDING AN IMMEDIATE DANGER TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH,
>SAFETY, AND WELFARE: Heartwater is an acute tick-borne disease of domestic
>and wild ruminants including cattle, sheep, goats and deer. This disease
>is caused by the rickettsial bacterium *Cowdria ruminantium* which is
>transmitted by the ticks of the genus *Amblyomma*. Animals or wildlife that
>contact this disease have a mortality rate of between 40-100%. There is no
>officially recognized treatment or vaccine for the disease other than to
>control the introduction of the tick vectors. The Department of Agriculture
>and Consumer Services (DACS) recently notified the Fish and Wildlife
>Conservation Commission (FWCC) that 15 *Amblyomma sparsum* ticks collected
>from tortoises in Hillsborough County have tested positive for *Cowdria*
>*ruminantium* (Heartwater organism). Also, since 1997, nine reptile
>facilities in Florida have been found to have ticks capable of carrying
>Heartwater disease. The ticks primarily infect two African tortoises of the
>genus *Geochelone*, the African spurred tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*) and the
>leopard tortoise (*Geochelone pardalis*).
>The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DASC) has also filed
>an emergency rule to deal with animals imported from countries where
>Heartwater disease is endemic and the FWCC emergency rule will parallel
>DACS efforts to control introduction of this disease through importation of
>tick-infected wildlife. The DACS rule asserts that "The introduction of the
>disease into Florida would be disastrous to the state's beef and cattle
>industry and the state's ruminant wildlife."
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>Therefore, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, vested by
>Article IV, Section 9, Florida Constitution, with the state's executive and
>regulatory authority over wildlife, finds that there is an immediate danger
>to the public welfare if immediate action is not taken to prohibit the
>importation of the African spurred tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*) and the
>leopard tortoise (*Geochelone pardalis*). The Commission also finds that this
>limited action is the best means to address the emergency and is in the
>best interests of the citizens of the State of Florida. It is the intent
>of the Commission to begin regular rulemaking to adopt permanent rules
>addressing this problem.
>REASONS FOR CONCLUDING THAT THE PROCEDURE USED IS FAIR UNDER THE
>CIRCUMSTANCES: The FWCC discussed this action at their regular meeting in
>Islamorada, Florida on December 9, 1999 and, at that public meeting, made
>the requisite findings of an emergency and that the rule procedure was
>fair. Given the need to act immediately to avert an infection of the
>state's livestock and infection of other ruminants, this rule is fair.
>The entire text of this emergency rule is to be published in the Florida
>Administrative Weekly and distributed to the Joint Administrative
>Procedures Committee of the Florida Legislature as required by Section
>120.54(4), Florida Statutes. Notice of this action of the FWCC is being
>distributed to about 2,000 persons and organizations, including major state
>newspapers and electronic media, on the Commission's mailing list.
>The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission hereby finds that the
>procedures used to promulgate this emergency rule are fair under the
>circumstances.
>SUMMARY OF THE RULE: This emergency rule will prohibit the importation into
>Florida two species of African tortoises, the African spurred tortoise
>(*Geochelone sulcata*) and the leopard tortoise (*Geochelone pardalis*).

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>A COPY OF THE EMERGENCY RULE MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING: James V.
>Antista, General Counsel, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 620
>South Meridian Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1600, (850) 487-1764.
>THE FULL TEXT OF THE EMERGENCY RULE IS:
>68A-ER-99-01. Emergency Prohibition Against Importation of Certain African
>Tortoises.
>(1) No African spurred tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*) or leopard tortoise
>(*Geochelone pardalis*) shall be imported or transported into the state.
>Specific Authority Art. IV, Sec. 9, Fla. Const. Law Implemented Art. IV,
>Sec. 9, Fla. Const. s. 120.54(4), F.S.
>EFFECTIVE DATE: December 17, 1999
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>3) EMERGENCY RULE
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>DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
>Division of Animal Industry
>RULE TITLE: RULE NUMBER:
>Heartwater Disease 5C-ER-99-1
>SPECIFIC REASONS FOR FINDING AN IMMEDIATE DANGER TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH,
>SAFETY AND WELFARE: Heartwater is an acute tick-borne disease of domestic
>and wild ruminants, including cattle, sheep, goats, deer and antelope.
>This killer disease is caused by the rickettsial bacterium *Cowdria*
>*ruminantium* which is transmitted by ticks of the genus *Amblyomma*. It is
>characterized by a rapid rise in body temperature, loss of appetite and
>respiratory distress, followed by nervous signs such as circling motions,
>incoordination, recumbency, and paddling movements of the limbs. Should
>this disease enter the United States, mortality rates in susceptible
>species would be expected to be from 40% to approaching 100%. Since there
>is no officially recognized treatment or practical vaccine to protect
>against the disease, prevention relies on control of its tick vectors. The
>same ticks are also potential vectors of diseases which may affect the
>general public.
> The justification for this action is the November 29, 1999
>notification that 15 *Amblyomma sparsum* ticks collected from tortoises in
>Hillsborough County have tested positive for *Cowdria ruminantium*
>(Heartwater) organism.
> Reptiles, amphibians, llamas, antelopes, and captive wild species from
>all areas are included in this rule because they are potential carriers of
>heartwater or ticks which are competent vectors of heartwater.
>Introduction of the disease into Florida would be disastrous to the State's
>beef and dairy cattle industries and the State's ruminant wildlife.
>REASONS FOR CONCLUDING THAT THE PROCEDURE USED IS FAIR UNDER THE
>CIRCUMSTANCES: Under this action requiring certification of non-exposure to
>the disease is justified until the Department has determined that a threat
>to cattle, deer and other ruminant animals in the state no longer exists.
>This action is fair because without this restriction, the state's
>multimillion dollar cattle industry and deer population is endangered.
>SUMMARY OF THE RULE: This rule places restrictions upon the importation of
>certain animals capable of carrying heartwater disease, or the vector of
>heartwater disease, into the state.
>THE PERSON TO BE CONTACTED REGARDING THE EMERGENCY RULE IS: Dr. Leroy M.
>Coffman, Director, Division of Animal Industry, Department of Agriculture
>and Consumer Services, 407 South Calhoun Street, Room 335, Mayo Building,
>Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0800. Phone 850/410-0900.
>THE FULL TEXT OF THE EMERGENCY RULE IS:
>5C-ER-99-1 - Temporary Restrictions on Importation of Animals
> (1) The Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (OCVI) for
>reptiles, amphibians, llamas, antelopes, and captive wild species entering
>the state must contain a statement by the issuing veterinarian that the
>animals identified on the OCVI are free of signs of infectious or

>communicable disease and the vectors of any infectious or communicable
>disease.
> (2) Animals from countries where heartwater is endemic.
> (a) All animals imported from countries where heartwater is endemic
>must have a prior permission number recorded on the accompanying OCVI. This
>number can be obtained from the Division by telephone.
> (b) All animals intended for importation into or through the State of
>Florida from countries where heartwater is endemic shall be accompanied by
>an OCVI issued in accordance with this rule, and showing that the
>veterinarian issuing the OCVI inspected the animals at the time of movement
>to the port of entry and found them free from ticks and any evidence of
>communicable disease and that, as far as it has been possible to determine,
>they have not been exposed to heartwater, or the vectors of heartwater,
>during the 60 days immediately preceding their movement to the port of entry.
> (c) All animals offered for entry into or through the State of Florida
>from countries where heartwater is endemic shall be subject to inspection
>at the port of entry, and all such animals found to be free from
>communicable disease and tick infestation and not to have been exposed
>thereto, shall be admitted into the United States subject to the other
>applicable provisions of this rule. Animals found to be infected with or
>have been exposed to a communicable disease, or infested with ticks, shall
>be refused entry. Animals refused entry shall be quarantined until such
>time that they have been inspected, treated and deemed to be free from
>communicable disease and tick infestation.
>Specific Authority: 570.07(21) and (23), 585.08(2)(a) F.S. Law Implemented:
>585.08(1), 585.145 F.S. History: New.
>THIS RULE TAKES EFFECT IMMEDIATELY UPON BEING FILED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF
>STATE.
>EFFECTIVE DATE: December 9, 1999.

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>MEMORANDUM

December 21, 1999

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> TO: REPTILE DEALERS, IMPORTERS, PET SHOPS, AND INTERESTED PERSONS

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> FROM: COLONEL ROBERT L. EDWARDS
> DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

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> SUBJECT: PROHIBITION ON IMPORTATION OF CERTAIN AFRICAN TORTOISES

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> In 1997, it was determined by University of Florida researchers that
>certain African species of wildlife were being imported into this state
>infected with "tropical bont ticks" that could carry the Heartwater
>Disease. Heartwater is an acute tick-borne disease of domestic and wild
>ruminants, including cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and antelope. This killer
>disease is caused by the rickettsial bacterium *Cowdria ruminantium*, which
>is transmitted by ticks of the genus *Amblyomma*. Should this disease enter
>the United States, mortality rates in susceptible species would be expected
>to be from 40 to 100 percent. There is no officially recognized treatment
>or vaccine to protect against the disease; therefore, if infected ticks

>were to spread to domestics or deer, it could spark an economic and
>wildlife disaster of epic proportions.

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> Commission Wildlife Inspectors and Livestock Inspectors for the
>Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services began collecting ticks from
>suspected reptile and mammal hosts in 1997. Since that time over 500 ticks
>capable of transmitting Heartwater have been found. Nine reptile
>facilities were found to have a total of 119 infected reptiles. However,
>none tested positive for the Cowdria ruminantium (Heartwater) organism until
>November 29, 1999. On this date, 15 Amblyomma sparsum ticks collected from
>tortoises in a Hillsborough County reptile facility tested positive for the
>disease. These ticks were found on leopard tortoises. The facility is now
>under quarantine and procedures are underway to eradicate all ticks in the
>area. We are hopeful that no wildlife nor domestics have been infected.

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>PROHIBITION ON IMPORTATION OF CERTAIN AFRICAN TORTOISES

>December 21, 1999

>Page 2

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> According to University researchers, the majority of the Amblyomma ticks
>capable of transmitting Heartwater collected, since 1997, were found on two
>species of African tortoises: the African spurred tortoise (Geochelone
>sulcata) and the leopard tortoise (Geochelone pardalis). Therefore, to
>protect Florida's wildlife and domestic livestock against this dreaded
>disease, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission passed an
>emergency rule prohibiting the importation or transportation into the state
>of any African spurred tortoise or leopard tortoise.

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> This prohibition went into effect on December 17, 1999. We are
>requesting your cooperation by immediately canceling any outstanding orders
>you may have for shipments of these species. Our Wildlife Inspectors will
>be monitoring wildlife imports coming into the
>state and will seize any shipments of these species. They will be returned
>to the shipping point at the vendor's expense. In addition, it is
>prohibited to accept domestic shipments of such tortoises into Florida.

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> Commission Officers will take appropriate legal action against anyone
>importing African spurred or leopard tortoises subsequent to this notice.
>It is imperative that anyone possessing these tortoises maintain their
>paperwork showing when they were received and their shipping origin. Such
>records shall be displayed upon request from any Commission Officer.

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> Currently, researchers are developing a safe treatment for removal of
>external parasites from the tortoises. When this treatment is tested and
>proven effective, you will be notified. It is imperative that all African
>spurred and leopard tortoises within Florida be treated for removal of
>ticks, as well as treatment of those reptiles which have been kept in
>proximity to African spurred or leopard tortoises. Other reptiles, such as
>pythons, have been found infected with the Amblyomma tick kept in reptile
>stocks maintained in commercial entities and private collections.

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> On December 9, 1999, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
>also passed an emergency rule regarding Heartwater. Their rule restricts
>the importation of all wildlife without an Official Certificate of
>Veterinary Inspection showing the animals to be free of disease and vectors
>of infectious disease. Please contact the Division of Animal Industry,
>Bureau of Disease Control, at (850) 488-7182 for additional details.

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> Again, thank you in advance for your cooperation and if we may answer any
>questions concerning the tortoise prohibition please call the Bureau of
>Support Services, (850) 488-6253.

